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## **ONLINE SAFETY TIPS FOR TEENS**

The Internet can be a great way to find information on an interest area, a particular hobby, or a school report. Most of all, the Internet is a new way to meet people that hold interests similar to yours. Unfortunately, people are not always as they seem. Even though you might think that you are self-sufficient and can identify danger, teens are more often the victims of Internet abuse than younger kids. That does not mean that teens are targeted more often, but that they are sometimes more susceptible to becoming victims. This happens most often through lapses of judgement and common sense that you should always apply while online.

### **The following are Online Tips for Teens:**

***Uncomfortable Situations.*** While surfing the Web, news reading, or chatting, there is a good chance that you could run into material that might make you feel uncomfortable. When Web surfing or news reading the simple solution is to stop and leave that particular site or newsgroup.

In a chat room, if someone sends you a message that makes you feel uncomfortable, you are under no obligation to continue chatting with that person. If repeated messages are sent then you can always leave the chat area and report that person to the service administrator and your parents. If you don't feel comfortable informing the administrator, ask your parents for help.

***Physical Danger.*** The largest risk that one can create online is posting information about who they are and/or where they can be located. Be careful of what is written while online and to whom it is being written. When you are chatting you cannot see who is reading your messages; you know only what they tell you, which may be false. Think of it as saying something out loud in a crowded room.

***Financial Danger.*** The Internet is continuously growing with Internet-only businesses; some are real businesses while others are shady. Giving out any financial information over the Internet can expose you to many types of risk. Be sure to discuss all Internet purchases with a parent.

***Harassment.*** While you may encounter things online that may make you feel uncomfortable, it was not always placed there with that in mind. Unfortunately, in chat rooms people often intentionally say uncomfortable things specifically to harass people. If you get one of these messages, do not take it personally and do not reply. Replies just encourage the person who is sending the messages. While some messages may just be annoying, others may be a crime. If you receive messages or images that are obscene, lewd, filthy, or indecent with the purpose of annoying, offending, abusing, threatening, or harassing you, report it to your ISP, to your police department or sheriff's office, and to your parents.

***Accountability For Your Behavior.*** While online one should avoid doing things that might hurt people or get yourself into trouble. One must take responsibility for actions on and off-line. Do not annoy, harass, offend, abuse, or threaten others while online.

***Don't Meet Internet Friends.*** People online can be whoever they want to be, and they are

under no obligation to tell the truth about who they are. If you do want to meet with someone, discuss it with your parents and do not meet anyone alone.

***Stay Informed.*** Keep in touch with friends at school for their opinion. See what friends are doing online and what occurrences they are running into. Sometimes information about the Internet travels faster by word of mouth than on the Net itself.

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